

# A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE  
Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CALL TO ARMS.

BOTH Randolph and Carolina were deeply affected by their father's words.

The daughter attempted to take on herself the blame for her brother's action.

"I was the older one. I might have stopped him if I had wished and should bear the burden."

"No, no, father," exclaimed the youth, his inborn self reliance prompting him to shoulder the consequences of his own mistakes. "I, and I alone, am responsible for what I did. I did not realize that it was wrong. I will not hide behind Carolina."

Carolina Langdon bore herself better than was to have been expected under the strain of the painful interview. She saw more clearly now how she had erred. She was undergoing an inward revolution that would make it impossible for her ever again to veer so far from the line of duty to her father, her family and to herself.

When Randolph had finished Carolina took up her own defense, and eloquently she pleaded the defense of many a woman who yearns for what she has not got, for what may be beyond her reach—the defense of the woman who chafes under the limitations of worldly position, of sex and of opportunity. It was the defense of an ambitious woman.

"Perhaps I ought to have been a man of the Langdon family," she exclaimed. "Father, oh, can't you understand that I couldn't doze my life away down on those plantations? You don't know what ambition is. I had to have the world. I had to have money. If I had been a man I would have tried big financial enterprises. I should have liked to fight for a fortune. You wouldn't have condemned me then. You might have said my methods were bold, but if I succeeded I would have been a great man. But just because I am a woman you think I must sit home with my knitting. No, father, the world does move. Women must have an equal chance with men, but I wish I had been a man!"

"Even then I hope you would have been a gentleman," rebuked her father sternly. "Women should have an equal chance, Carolina. They should have an equal chance for the same virtues as men, not for the same vices."

"But an equal chance," returned the girl fervently. "There, father, you have admitted what I have tried to prove. The woman with the spirit of a man, the spirit that cries to a woman, 'Advance! Accomplish! Be something! Strike for yourself,' cannot sit idly by while all the world moves on. If it is true that I have chosen the wrong means, the wrong way, to better my lot I did it through ignorance, and



"Women must have an equal chance." that ignorance is the fault of the times in which I live, of the system that guides the era in which I live.

"I am what the world calls 'educated,' but the world, the world of men, knows better. It laughs at me. It has cheated me because I am a woman. The world of men has fenced me in and hobbled me with convention, with precedent, with fictitious sentiment. If I pursue the business of men as they themselves would pursue it I am called an ungrateful daughter. If I should adopt the morals of men I would be called a fallen woman. If I adopted the religion of men I would have no religion at all. Turn what way I will!"

"But not every woman feels the way you do, my daughter," broke in the senator.

"No, you are right, because their spirit has been crushed by generations, by centuries of forced subservience to men. They tell us we should be thankful that we do not live in China, where women are physical slaves to men. In our country they are forced to be mental and social slaves to men. Is one very much worse than the other?"

"Then, dear," and her father's face

was very gentle, "if you want an equal chance—want to be equal to a man—you must take your medicine with Randolph, like a man."

"What are you going to do, sir?" she asked, afraid.

"I'm going to spoil all your little scheme, dear," he returned, smiling sadly. "I'm going, I fear, to make you lose all your money. I'd like to make it easy for you, but I can't. You've got to take your medicine, children, and when it's all over back there in Mississippi I shall be able, I hope, to patch up your broken lives and together we will work out your mistakes. I can't think of that now. The honor of the Langdons calls. This is the time for the fight, and any one who fights against me must take the consequences."

He walked over and touched the bell. "Thomas," he said to the servant who responded, "take that letter at once to Senator Peabody, in the library."

"What is it, sir?" asked Randolph.

"It's the call to arms," responded his father grimly.

Senator Peabody read the letter to which Haines had signed Langdon's name and jumped up from his chair in the library in astonishment. Without a word to the startled Stevens he rushed to confront Langdon.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted as he burst in on the junior senator from Mississippi.

"Of what?" asked the southerner, with a blandness that added fuel to Peabody's irritation.

"Don't trifle with me, sir!" cried "the boss of the senate." "This letter. You sent it. Explain it! I'm in no mood to joke."

Langdon looked at him calmly.

"I think the letter is quite plain, senator," he said. "You can read it. Then he turned to his daughter. "This discussion cannot possibly interest you, my dear. Will you go to the drawing room to receive our guests?"

Carolina obeyed. She seemed to be discovering new qualities in this father whom she had considered to be too old fashioned for his time.

"Now, senator, go ahead, and, Randolph, you bring Stevens."

"You're switching to Gulf City?" demanded Peabody.

"I'm considering Gulf City," agreed Langdon.

Peabody brought down his fist on the table.

"It's too late to consider anything, Langdon," he cried. "We're committed to Altaicola, and Altaicola it is. I don't care what you heard of Gulf City. Now, I'd like to settle this thing in a friendly manner, Langdon. I like always for every member of the senate to have his share of the power and the patronage. We've been glad to put you forward in this naval base matter. We appreciate the straightforwardness, the honesty of your character. You look well. You're the kind of politician the public thinks it wants nowadays, but you've been in the senate long enough to know that bills have to pass, and you know you can't get through anything without my friends, and I tell you now I'll throttle any Gulf City plan you bring up."

"Then if you are as sure of that you can't object to my being for Gulf City?" asked Langdon.

"Are you financially interested in Gulf City?" demanded Peabody.

"Senator Peabody!" exclaimed Langdon.

"Don't flare up, Langdon," retorted Peabody. "That sort of thing has happened in the senate. There are often perfectly legitimate profits to be made in some regular commercial venture by a man who has inside information as to what's doing up on Capitol hill."

"Senator Peabody," asked Langdon, "why are you so strong for Altaicola?"

The Pennsylvanian hesitated.

"Its natural advantages," he said at last.

The southerner shook his head.

"Oh, that's all? Well, if natural advantages are going to settle it, is, and influence, go ahead and vote, and I'll just bring in a minority report for Gulf City."

"The boss of the senate" was in a corner now.

"Confound it, Langdon, if you will have it, I am interested in Altaicola," Langdon nodded.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said.

"Now you see why it's got to be Altaicola," persisted the boss.

"I don't mind telling you, then, Senator Peabody," answered Langdon calmly, "that my being for Gulf City was a bluff. I've been trying to draw you out. Gulf City is a mud bank and no more fitted to be a naval base than Keokuk, Ia. Altaicola it's got to be, for the good of the country and the honor of Mississippi."

"And one thing more, senator. I'd just like to add that not a single man connected with that committee is going to make a cent out of the deal. You get that straight?"

CHAPTER XXI.

"IF YOU CAN'T BUY A SENATOR, THREATEN HIM."

SENATOR PEABODY was the most surprised man in Washington when he heard the junior senator from Mississippi state that no one was to enrich himself out of the government naval base project.

He heaped a mental anathema on the head of Stevens for saddling such a man on the senate "machine," for Langdon would of course never have been put on "naval affairs" (just now very important to the machine) without the "O. K." of Stevens, who had won a heretofore thoroughly reliable reputation as a judge of men, or of what purported to be men.

The thought that at this time, of all times, there should be a man on the committee on naval affairs that could not be "handled" was sufficient to make him who revealed in the title of "boss of the senate" determine that he must get another chief lieutenant to replace Stevens, who had proved so trustworthy in the past. Stevens had lost his cunning!

As the vote of Langdon could not be secured by hugging or in exchange for favors and as it could not be "delivered," Peabody, of course, was willing to pay in actual cash for the vote. This was the final step, but one in political conspiracies of this nature—cash. But Langdon would not take cash, so Peabody had to resort to the last agency of the trained and corrupt manipulator of legislation.

He would threaten.

Moreover, he knew that to make threats effective, if it is possible to do so, they must be led up to systematically—that is, they should be made at the right time. The scene must be set, as in a play.

Senator Peabody glared at Langdon as though to convince the latter that to stand in his way would mean political destruction.

"So nobody is going to make a cent, eh? Well, I suppose you want all the profits for yourself." Turning to Stevens, who had just entered, the Pennsylvanian cried:

"Do you but listen to our suddenly good friend Langdon. He wants to be the only man to make money out of the naval base. He won't listen to any other member of the naval committee making a cent out of it. Why, he—"

"Great God, sir!" exclaimed Langdon. "You are going too far, Peabody. You state what is false, and you know it, you—"

"Then you are willing that others should have their rightful share?" put in Stevens. "Oh, I understand now, senator."

"No, no, no!" cried Langdon. "You do not understand, Senator Stevens, and I must say I am ashamed to speak of you by the honorable title of senator, sir. I will not listen to any person enriching himself at the government expense, and I am your enemy, you, Peabody, and you, Stevens, beyond recall. You both know you misrepresent me."

Langdon walked over to Stevens and faced him directly.

"Do you remember, Stevens, Lorimer Hawkslee, back in wartime?"

"Yes," said Stevens, puzzled. "I remember him—a very fine gentleman."

The old planter sneered.

"Yes, a very fine gentleman! You remember he got rich out of contracts for supplies furnished to the Confederate government when it wasn't any too easy for the Confederate government to pay and when he was in that government himself. I never quite thought that the act of a gentleman, Stevens. It seemed to me to be very like dishonesty. I refused to speak to Lorimer Hawkslee in the Carroll hotel at Vicksburg, and when the people there asked me why I told them. I want to warn you, Stevens, that I'm likely to meet you some time in the Carroll hotel at Vicksburg."

Stevens backed away angrily. "I catch your insinuation, but"—he received a warning glance from Peabody and broke into a pleasant smile calculated to deceive the old planter—"this once I will overlook it because of our old friendship and the old days in Mississippi."

"You are a fine talker, Langdon," said Peabody, coming to Stevens' rescue, "but I can readily see what you are driving at. You want an investigation. You think you will catch some

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of us with what you reformers call 'the goods,' but forget evidently the entirely simple facts that your family has invested in Altaicola lands more heavily probably than any one else among us. You want to raise a scandal, do you? Well, go on and raise it, but remember that you will have to explain how it happened that there is \$50,000 invested in the name of your son and \$25,000 in the name of your daughter, Miss Carolina, not to mention a few thousands put in by the gentleman who, I am given to understand, is to be your son-in-law, Congressman Norton.

"How about that, Norton?" Peabody asked, turning to the congressman, who had followed Stevens.

"I corroborate all you've said," remarked Norton. "I can state positively that Senator Langdon knew that his



"I'm likely to meet you some time in the Carroll hotel."

money was going into Altaicola land. I will swear to it if necessary," and he glared bitterly at Carolina's father, feeling certain that the girl would cling to him as opposed to her parent.

Langdon made a threatening move at the congressman.

"I consider my riddance of you mighty cheap at the price," he cried.

"Come, come, Langdon," fumed Peabody. "I must get away from here to catch the midnight train. Let's get through with this matter. You must realize that you cannot fight me in Washington. You must know that men call me the 'king of the senate.' I can beat any measure you introduce. I can pass any measure you want passed. I can make you a laughing-stock or a power."

"Why, my friend from Mississippi, I can even have your election to the senate contested, have a committee appointed to investigate the manner of your election, have that committee decide that you bought your way into the honorable body, the senate of the United States, and on the strength of that decision have you forfeit your seat! What a pretty heritage to hand down to posterity such a disgrace will be! Why, the very school children of the future will hear about you as 'Looter Langdon,' and their parents will tell them how particularly degrading it was for a man of your reputation to drag into your dishonest schemes your son, sir, and your daughter. For who will believe that this money was not put in these lands without your consent, without your direction, your order? Did you not sign the mortgage on which this \$50,000 was raised?"

Senator Langdon waved his hand deprecatingly. "I'm learning the underhanded ways of you professional politicians. I'm getting wise. I'm learning 'the game,' so I know you're bluffing me, Peabody. But you forget that the game of poker was invented in Mississippi—my native state."

Pressing a button, Langdon summoned a servant and said: "Send in

Mr. Haines. I guess I've got to have a witness for my side."

"It's no bluff," spoke Stevens as Haines entered. "Peabody can and will break you like a pipestem; he's done it to other men before you who—"

He tried to dispute his power. But I'll try to save you. I'll ask him to be merciful. You are not of any importance in the senate. We do not need to deal with you."

"Then why do you both spend so much time on me?" asked Langdon innocently. "Why doesn't Peabody go to Philadelphia?"

"Langdon," said Peabody, "you know my control of the senate is no piece of fiction. But I will forgive your obstinacy, even forget it. I—"

"Look here," cried Langdon, "just because I'm a fat man don't think that I can't lose my temper." He stopped and gazed at his two colleagues.

"Now, you two men stay still one moment, and I'll tell you what really

has happened tomorrow," he exploded, "and I'm only a beginner in the game that's your specialty. The naval base is going to Altaicola!"

"Good!" simultaneously cried both Peabody and Stevens. "You're coming in with us!"

"No, I'm not, but I'll pass the bill so that nobody makes a cent, just as I said I would. I'll fool you both and make you both honest for once in spite of your natural dispositions."

Stevens and the Pennsylvanian stared at each other in disgust.

"Furthermore," continued Langdon, "Altaicola must have the base because

we've known for some time that Gulf City was impossible. But some crooked senators would have made money if they'd known it, so they didn't learn it. Altaicola, that proud arm of our great gulf, will have those battleships floating on her broad bosom and the country will be to the better off, and as will the sovereign state of Mississippi—God bless it—but neither Senator Peabody of Pennsylvania nor Senator Stevens of Mississippi is going to be any better because of it. No, and if you men come to my committee room at 12:30 tomorrow noon you'll have a chance to hear how all that's coming about. If you are not there by that time I'll bring in a minority report in favor of Gulf City just to show you that I know how to play the game—this Washington game!"

"Come, let's go. We can do nothing with him," said Peabody to the senior senator from Mississippi.

"Well, senator, in the name of goodness, what are you going to do? How can you win for Altaicola without letting these grafters make money out of it?" asked Haines in astonishment as he other two walked away. "What are you going to do at 12:30 tomorrow?"

Langdon turned to him and rolled his eyes toward the ceiling despairingly.

"I'm blamed if I know," he exclaimed.

(Continued next week.)

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